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To: ceq_nepa@fs.fed.us
cc:
Subject: Protect NEPA -- and the U.S. environment

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Dear Mr. Greczmiel

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is one of the most important environmental laws of the United States. NEPA guarantees that environmental impacts of proposed projects are identified and considered when the projects involve federal funds or a federal permit. NEPA gives the public the opportunity to participate and comment before an action decision is made.

I have been involved in more than one NEPA review process in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. It is a wonderful mechanism for alerting all segments of the community to proposed federal (or federally funded) actions that may have a significant environmental impact. It is one of our best devices for insuring "government in the sunshine"--which is in all of our interests.

One of the best examples of how NEPA should work is the environmental review currently being undertaken by the Corps of Engineers regarding the King William Reservoir project proposed by Newport News, VA.

I understand that at the beginning of the process Newport News claimed it needed the reservoir because it required another 39 million gallons of water per day to accommodate growth. After public comment challenged Newport News' claimed water need, a Corps of Engineers analysis lowered the need to 15-17 mgd. Confronted with these facts, Newport News lowered its own estimated need to 22-27 mgd.

The Corps' environmental analysis also identified significant prospective environmental harm to wetlands and environmental justice impacts to local Native Americans and found that these harmful impacts could not be adequately mitigated. As a result, Corps' Record of Decision held that the permit should be denied.

The Corps' decision in this case has been elevated to the North Atlantic Division as the result of an objection from then-Governor James Gilmore. The underlying NEPA analysis and the decision by the Norfolk District of the Corps of Engineers, however, still stand as outstanding examples of the way the National Environmental Policy Act should work.

Please ensure that nothing weakens NEPA or its environmental analysis and public participation process requirements, which are essential to protecting America's environment and special places like the Mattaponi River.

While going through the NEPA process is somewhat of a daunting task for anyone proposing any changes in federal facilities, the community preservation achieved through this process makes it worth the effort.

Please leave the NEPA process alone. Let future projects with federal involvement be "winnowed" through that environmental review mechanism so that capital improvements can be made in a rational, environmentally sound manner.

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